

Interview with Abelardo Valdez

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ABELARDO VALDEZ

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: March 22, 1988. This is an interview with Ambassador Abelardo Valdez concerning his career in Foreign Affairs. My name is Charles Stuart Kennedy, and this interview is being done on behalf of the Foreign Service History Center and the Association for Diplomatic Ambassadors.

The first question, Mr. Ambassador, what led to your interest in the field of foreign affairs?

VALDEZ: [My assignment as a military aide to President Lyndon Johnson.] — at the White House at various functions, and as a result of that plus a general curiosity about the world led me to decide to embark on a career that would give me an opportunity to work in international affairs. I decided to do this, however, via the law. And after my military service I went to study law at Baylor.

Q: Excuse me which service were you in?

VALDEZ: Army Corps of Engineers. I went to Baylor Law School in Texas in 1967 and graduated in 1970. During that period I was also offered a fellowship to study at the Hague Academy of International Law for a term. That was in 1969. This deepened my interest in international law and international affairs, and upon graduating from Baylor I decided to do

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an advanced degree, Master of Law, in international law at Harvard Law School. That was in 1970-71.

Subsequently I came to Washington where I worked in various government, corporations and agencies and practiced law in another law firm prior to being appointed to my first presidential appointment which was Assistant Administrator of the U.S.A. Institute for International Development for Latin American and the Caribbean in 1977 through 1979. And upon completing that service, President Carter asked me to become Chief of Protocol for the White House with personal rank of Ambassador. I served in that position from '79 to '81.

Each of these positions throughout my career has led to even greater involvement in international affairs, and presently in my law firm I specialize in international trade and investment and continue my active interest in the area of international affairs.

Q: How well did you find that your training in international law prepared you when you first came to Washington and were involved first with this Overseas Private Investment Corporation? Did this have any area of concentration? Did you specialize?

VALDEZ: I specialized in Latin America and the Caribbean, and I think that the preparation as an international lawyer was very helpful because OPIC is a government corporation that insures and finances U.S. investments in developing countries. Naturally in the course of my duties I would come in contact with people in the Foreign Service, the Foreign Commercial Service, the Department of State. The corporation is under the policy guidance of the Secretary of State. And so, therefore, I was in the Foreign Service in a specialized niche, if you will, of that service.

Q: How much direction did you get from the State Department in this? I'm really thinking towards policy concerns.

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VALDEZ: Policy concerns regarding trade and investment, substantial involvement, because every investment that we at OPIC insured, decided to insure or finance, had to have the clearance of the Embassy in the country where the investment was going to be made and by the Department of State before we could issue an insurance policy or we could finance a particular investment.

Q: Did you find that these investments sometimes OPIC wanted to go one way and the Embassy, State Department wanted to go the other?

VALDEZ: Yes, I think like in any other activity there were differences of opinion as to whether a particular project had some development impact or not. Was it positive or negative? Was there active interest on the part of the host government in this particular investment? Sometimes when there were problems over an investment that we had insured or financed, obviously there were different thoughts as to how to handle those problems. Before OPIC can operate in any country it had to negotiate a bilateral agreement with that government that gave it certain rights in case an investment was expropriated. And in some cases, the country was not willing to negotiate that kind of agreement or they would have certain restrictions as to what OPIC's right would be in case of expropriation and so forth. So, yes, there were, not frequent, but occasionally disagreements.

Q: Well, were we begin particularly careful when you were there? This was from 1971 to 1973 during the Nixon administration. Did you see a different focus than you were to see later on from AID regarding our policy towards countries in Latin America that had military rule as opposed to being more democratic?

VALDEZ: Well, at that time, of course, there were quite a few military governments in Latin America and OPIC had particular problems in some of those countries such as in Peru where the International Petroleum Corporation expropriation had taken place. Also, in Chile under a civilian actually — initially under the Allende government — shortly to

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be taken over by the military. Those were areas where OPIC had major problems over expropriations.

Q: How did you settle these policy matters between say State and OPIC?

VALDEZ: By, like most other policy disputes are settled, negotiation, consultation, dialogue and eventually State would make the final say.

Q: But did you feel that you were having a real input into the decisions or was this something that was sort of made on grounds other than what you felt were valid?

VALDEZ: No, we had an input, but we wouldn't be the only ones who had an input. Treasury, for example, had an input. The Commerce Department might have an input. But we had our say, and then a position was taken.

Q: State has often been accused of having a rather weak economic arm in that the best economists don't stay with State. They go to Treasury or somewhere else and, of course, you were very much involved in the economic side. How did you find State's economic branch?

VALDEZ: I was involved when I was at AID, of course, in economic development but we were an independent agency under the policy guidance. We had our own policy authority for many of the things that we did, so I didn't really have that much interaction with the Economic Bureau, for example, when I was at AID. I did have some when I was at OPIC but not enough to really make a good judgment.

I think the historical problem at State regarding international economic policy is that the Secretary of State has never been much interested until now when we have a great economist. ...

Q: George Shultz.

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VALDEZ: George Shultz. But in the past I remember Henry Kissinger saying that gentlemen just don't deal with that sort of economic commercial things. That's how it was perceived as late as that administration. When in fact economics has got to be at least number two to war and peace in importance to the welfare of this nation.

Q: Did you find a lack of interest in your connection to the Nixon administration as you saw it from OPIC?

VALDEZ: Remember I was in the Nixon era — I want to clarify — I was a GS-12 lawyer. I was a career service. I was not appointed by President Nixon to that position. I just wanted to make that very clear.

Q: So you were somewhat removed from this, but even from that vantage point did you see an interest in Latin America? Kissinger is renowned for not having much interest in Latin America. In fact, he was said to say, "Latin America is a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica". He viewed it as of little importance.

VALDEZ: Yes. It's most unfortunate because had more careful attention been paid to Latin America in that period and in earlier administrations perhaps the situation in Central America would not have gotten to the point that it is now, a powder keg. But not only attention but the right kind of treatment which I think has been historically lacking in our relation with Latin American and has led to much miscommunication, misunderstanding and conflict. That's highly unfortunate. I hope that the next Secretary of State and those of the future will take a more active interest in Latin America, will have an expertise and understanding of the situation. We seem to be more attracted to faraway places than we are to our own backyard, and yet there could be nothing more vital to the future relations of this country with its neighbors to the south.

Q: How did you come — you were a civil servant and then you were appointed to AID in a political position.

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VALDEZ: Right. I went from OPIC to become General Counsel of the Interamerican Foundation, which is also a U.S. government corporation that promotes and finances via grants public sector private development in Latin America — economic development. I worked there for two years. Then I went into private practice. And then it was out of the private life that I was appointed to the first political position.

Q: Had you taken part in politics by this time?

VALDEZ: I always had a very active interest but more importantly I had a lot of friends who were much more active and involved. It was as a result of that connection and the fact that I had this background in Latin America both in education as well as in experience that led to this first appointment at AID.

Q: Well, what was your background in education and experience?

VALDEZ: Well, I mentioned to you that I had studied law. I had studied at the Hague. I had studied at Harvard. My specialty was in international law. Everything I did at OPIC and the Interamerican Foundation related to different aspects of private investment, trade and economic development in Latin America. At the time that I was appointed I had just been selected to be a lecturer at the John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics at Harvard to teach a seminar on U.S.-Latin American relations. In fact, I was halfway through the course when I was selected. I was doing that while continuing my law practice here in Washington.

Q: Your law practice was here in Washington so you were close of the hub. Had you sought this assignment as Assistant Administrator?

VALDEZ: No, I didn't seek it. I knew that I was being recommended for positions at the Department of State as the new administration was being staffed, but I thought it would relate to Latin America in some way. That was my background and my expertise. Indeed that's the way it proved out.

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Q: This is in 1977. You went in as Assistant Administrator for Latin America. How did this fit in within the AID organization?

VALDEZ: Well, there are four regional bureaus at AID. Latin America and the Caribbean being one of them, and historically one of the largest, especially after the Alliance for Progress experience in the 60s. And I was one of the four regional administrators, each of us having the equivalent rank of an Assistant Secretary of State. And we were basically the front line managers and policy makers for our region, always under the supervision of the Administrator, who at that time was former Governor John Gilligan.

Q: When you took over this job, did you have any marching orders coming both from Gilligan, from the Secretary of State, from the President, what they wanted you to accomplish?

VALDEZ: Well, the policy guidance was provided by the President, the Secretary and the Administrator. Speaking for the President at the International Council, for example, would have some input into our economic development policy in Latin America. The Secretary and the Assistant Secretary for Interamerican Affairs were very actively involved in what we were doing in the sense of providing the overall guidance with particular countries and so forth.

Q: Was there any particular priority placed on Latin America when you came on? The Nixon administration had not given Latin America very high priority and now a new administration came in. Democratic administrations tend to be a little more interested in Latin America I think than Republican.

VALDEZ: They have a different kind of interest.

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Q: Different type of interest, but then anyway you were coming in with a change of administration. Were there any things that you felt you and the people who were giving you guidance felt that should be remedied and new priorities made towards Latin America?

VALDEZ: One of the highest priorities — and it wasn't just Latin America but the other area was an objective of trying to meet basic human needs versus the resource transfers of direct cash assistance to the governments, or balance of payments assistance, and that sort of thing. There was an effort to really get down to the grass roots and to concentrate on education, housing, health, on the agricultural development, rural development. I think that was a major priority at that time.

Q: How well did you think AID was staffed? I'm really not thinking of numbers, but in expertise. Did you feel that you got both good advice and good information? Or were there problems with this?

VALDEZ: I thought at least my bureau was well staffed. We had people who knew the region well. Many of them had served in Peace Corps positions before, so they had been at the grassroots and then had worked their way through AID. I found the AID officers to be very competent, very dedicated people.

Q: Did you find that it was useful to get out and take a look and see what was happening in the various countries?

VALDEZ: Yes, it was, and I think any administrator has to do that because nothing can substitute for first hand observation. I found it very useful to do that, and I did it very frequently.

Q: Were there many disputes between some of the people at the home office and in the field in priorities? Did you find that on your trips you were having to come back and sort of work these out?

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VALDEZ: Yes, that was a common problem in part because of different views. The people that were actually working in the field had first hand knowledge and information, whereas those back home could not be as well informed, could not be as well informed. And there were different perceptions that arose as to what programs were needed, how to implement them and so forth. So part of the manager's job is to reconcile those views and to make decisions.

Q: What were the main priorities that you saw in Latin America? Let's go by country. Where did we feel that we needed to do something and do something rather drastically?

VALDEZ: Well, I think Central America because it's the poorest part of the Latin America region and that's where we concentrated our resources. And also in some of the South American countries like Bolivia and Ecuador. They were substantially underdeveloped in comparison with their neighbors. In the Caribbean where there were different kinds of problems, problems of economies of scale. Small countries, island countries. So those were the areas I think where we had the greatest concern about. AID didn't have programs in every country. We're not in Mexico or in Argentina and other countries that were considered now self-sufficient.

Q: At that time I guess Mexico was in a different position than it is today.

VALDEZ: Yes.

Q: It was doing very well.

VALDEZ: In was into the oil boom.

Q: Were we avoiding any countries because of the type of government it had?

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VALDEZ: Yes, the type of government and the human rights violations. Those were considerations imposed by the Congress as well as by the Executive Branch and by the people of this country.

Q: I know my experience being on a country team in Seoul, Korea at the time of the Carter administration was that there was often a dual message coming out. One, you've got to shore this country up, help it, at the same time do everything you can to change its attitude towards human rights. The human rights policy must have at times conflicted with your goals in AID, didn't it?

VALDEZ: Well, obviously when you're in economic development, you want to see economic development succeed and move ahead. The human rights required decisions that sometimes slow down those programs, but it was a policy of the United States government that that was the important thing at that particular point.

Q: Do you find, for example, that Pat Derian running the Human Rights Bureau of the State Department — I mean her office actually — kept very close track of what AID was doing in various countries, ones where there was a question concerning human rights?

VALDEZ: Oh, yes. Not only what AID was doing but what Commerce and Ex-Im Bank and others were doing. The policy of this government was and I think it still is as required by legislation that human rights has got to be a top priority in all of our policies and our programs of economic cooperation.

Q: Did you find that there were any human rights concerns that were in any particular country that you can think of that may have inhibited what we might have done perhaps in Central America?

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VALDEZ: Well, there were countries where we either stopped or reduced assistance because of human rights violations. I just saw it implementing the policy of the President and U.S. government.

Q: Of course, this was period where there were major concern in Brazil with Indians on the Amazon. Did we have anything working with Brazil at that time?

VALDEZ: I think we had one person with population assistance in Brazil. We didn't have a program in Brazil. Nothing to speak of.

Q: The Alliance for Progress, was that pretty well dead by that time?

VALDEZ: Yes.

Q: Even under different names?

VALDEZ: Yes. I think it died about 1967, 1968, when our focus shifted to Vietnam, the Vietnam war. Not only the financial commitment but the spirit for the Alliance died around that time.

Q: Was there any effort to rekindle the flame when the Carter administration came in?

VALDEZ: Yes, there was. Unfortunately the period from '68 to '76 had created a lot of ill will with the Latin American countries. There was a sense of a separateness from the United States as to what was needed for economic development, as to what was needed for international cooperation on trade and investment. And so it was very difficult to overcome. Countries were suffering economically. As a result, in many cases military governments took over. There were some severe economic problems, and those problems while somewhat better now.continue. As far as the military leaving positions of power, but not completely. Look at Panama. So there was an effort on the part of the Carter

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administration and in part succeeded, but circumstances made it very difficult to rekindle the spirit of the Alliance.

Q: Looking on it, where did you find yourself concentrating on certain areas within Latin America, you yourself either through your previous experience, or were you spread fairly across the board?

VALDEZ: Well, by necessity had to be spread across the board, but our largest programs were Central America and the Caribbean. That's where the greatest need happened to be. The Caribbean became increasingly important. It had been an area that had been ignored by and large in the past programs, and I think during the Carter administration we did a lot more in the Caribbean than we had in the past.

Q: One of the major ones I guess was Jamaica.

VALDEZ: Well, Jamaica and the eastern Caribbean and the Dominican Republic. Across the board. That really was the beginning of the Caribbean Basin initiative. President Carter sent a fact finding mission. Ambassador Andrew Young and I, a delegation of other people, went on a fact finding tour there in '77. And that was really the beginning of the Caribbean Basin initiative, later to be formally named that in the Reagan administration.

Q: Well, now, take a country such as Haiti, which has been described so often as being a basket case. Did you feel that there was any hope for using our aid other than merely keeping it afloat?

VALDEZ: Well, Haiti is a very complex situation and needs a lot of aid, but it's a complex problem. It involves the human resource development, developing more efficient government bureaucracy to implement programs. It involved the need to develop the private sector to create more jobs and to also meet the basic human needs, which is an overwhelming priority.

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Q: And, of course, the government there was the Duvalier government at that time, which was not very responsive.

VALDEZ: Right.

Q: Speaking of that type of government, the fact that we were channeling aid which in the end analysis amounted to equipment or money, how did the deal with the problem of corruption, or having this equipment or money being channeled to those in power?

VALDEZ: AID has some very, very stringent auditing requirements. A lot of people think that you just take bushels of cash and deliver it to the front door of the Prime Minister or President of the country and that that's how it's done. Far from it. In fact, we're involved in the actual development of the programs, the funding and the implementation and the evaluation of the programs. So there's constant involvement. And that's why our AID missions have sometimes more people than the embassies. It has experts in the various areas and, as I said, very stringent auditing and accounting requirements. So if there were abuses, they were few and far between as far as I know.

And then you have other agencies like the GAO overseeing what AID was doing. So, in fact, sometimes you wondered if the accountants didn't cross legs along the way. And they, quite frankly, made it difficult sometimes to implement the programs because there's a lot of checking, double checking, triple checking. So I guess that AID could be abused, but having stood my watch, I found it to be really not too frequent.

Q: How well was AID received in the countries where it was? Obviously anybody wants money or equipment or what have you, but at the same time you were talking about these rather stringent controls and all that. There often the accusation that the United States acts like a big brother and oversupervises. Did you find this was a problem?

VALDEZ: I heard complaints along those lines from time to time, but by and large I think AID was appreciated, not only the financial assistance but the technical assistance. And

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that's what the AID missions were providing to our people. So overall I think a plus for our relationship with those countries.

Q: How about with the foreign press, the press in the various countries? Do you think we were getting the credit that we should have, or was it just expected that we would do this?

VALDEZ: I think by and large we got pretty credit. I can only tell you from the two years, two and a half years experience, but I don't remember any negative stories. There might have been one or two, but there were quite few positive stories about the AID in various countries, what kind of success we were having. I may not be the best person to answer that since I didn't deal with the press on a day to day basis.

Q: A very important element of AID is that agency's relations with Congress. There's nothing probably more begrudging than Congress giving out money to people who've not actual constituents. And I imagine that you must have had a great deal of work explaining to people either in conferences or in private conversations with Congress. How did you operate?

VALDEZ: Well, like all officials of the government at that level that have a program to administer, we had to defend our budget. We had to present our budget annually to the Congress and then answer the questions of the Congress in hearings. Then throughout the year, of course, there would be questions and letters to be answered regarding different programs that individual members of Congress were interested in. Often we were called up to see a particular member who had concerns or had a particular interest and try to work with him in dealing with those concerns. So it was sort of an ongoing dialogue with the Congress on a formal basis as well as informal.

Q: Well, did you have any congressmen who were particularly interested in this either pro or con as far as AID to Latin America, ones that you dealt with?

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VALDEZ: Well, I don't want to name any names, but certainly those on the Foreign Affairs Committee and Foreign Relations, had a very strong interest. Those on the Appropriations committees that dealt with our particular program, perhaps on Appropriations you find more objections than you did in the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees. More objections, and obviously these committees had a different responsibility to make sure that U.S. tax dollars were being properly used and that we were not using more money than was required to do the job.

Q: During the time you were there, was there an increase in what aid was going out as compared to the later Nixon years?

VALDEZ: Yes, there was an increase, but not much. A different kind of aid, as I said, more directed to the basic human needs. I recommended an increase in my region. It was a constant battle because of scarce resources, and I was disappointed that we couldn't do more because the problems that we see now, again, are problems that are based in great part in the poverty and the economic imbalances in those countries.

Q: How effective did you find the State/AID relationship was?

VALDEZ: I guess you could say friendly tension, because obviously State was looking at the political ramifications of our AID program and we were looking more at the economic development goals. And so there was always a healthy tension there, but the law requires that this program be under the policy guidance of the Department of State and the Secretary of State, so State was doing its job and we were doing ours. And trying to work it out was a daily event.

Q: How did you work? Did you usually talk to the people in ARA, American Republics, on the State side or was this done through the administrator, or how did you operate?

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VALDEZ: Both ways. We had a very close relationship with the ARA Assistant Secretary. In fact, our offices were on the same corner of the building.

Q: This is the one area in the Department, I believe, where they set this up very early.

VALDEZ: Yes, as a result of the Alliance for Progress. And then there were things that had to go up to the Secretary or say the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs usually would do that through the Administrator.

Q: So there was, as you said, healthy tension between the two.

VALDEZ: Yes.

Q: Were there any sort of knock down, drag out battles, any issues that were particularly difficult?

VALDEZ: I can't remember any now. But, yes, there were some. I said healthy tension. Sometimes it got a little unhealthy, but I think that was to be expected where two different goals collide.

Q: How effective were we in getting coordination with other organizations that were trying to give help? These are the other organizations.

VALDEZ: We certainly tried very hard, and I know during the period I was there we put a lot of emphasis not only in coordination but in actually doing some things together. For example, we co-financed with The World Bank and IDB. ...

Q: IDB is International Development.

VALDEZ: Inter-American Development Bank. And so we were actually involved in doing things together, in programs together, as well as coordinating our separate programs so that we would make the most efficient use of our resources.

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Q: Was this a somewhat different approach than had been prior to your coming in? Or had this been worked recently

VALDEZ: Well, I think coordination has always been a goal, but I remember, in fact, it was during that time that IDCA, the International Development Cooperation Agency, a sort of umbrella that was supposed to be not only over AID but all our economic cooperation programs, including Ex-Im Bank and OPIC and our involvement with international banks like The World Banks and IDB, was created specifically for the purpose of improving and making more effective our coordination with all these other agencies and organizations.

Q: You mentioned that the Vietnam war and our concern there pretty well killed the Alliance for Progress. What about the Arab-Israeli conflict? It always seems when they list AID all of a sudden one looks at it and the amount of military materials and other types of materials are going particularly to Egypt and to Israel, which obviously are for political purposes rather than for economic development. Did you find some sort of either resentment trying to get some of this largesse directed your way?

VALDEZ: No, I started in that period, the late 60s and 70s, that also called dramatically on the AID resources for those two countries and that did limit what you could get then for the rest of the world. And I think that's still the case.

Q: Did you treat this as a given that there was no hope of challenging this to get some more money to your area or were there effects to do so?

VALDEZ: I don't think there was ever a case that we thought we could get whatever was going in that direction to Latin America. It just made it difficult even to get moderate resources for the rest.

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Q: How about the drug problem? It has been a problem that's been growing all the time, but obviously Colombia and some other places, Bolivia, were in the drug trade. Was this a concern of AID at this time?

VALDEZ: Yes, we were concerned. We were trying crop substitution, particularly in Bolivia. Unfortunately, the market prevailed, and the crops that were being offered as substitutes were not as profitable as cocoa. And that was a problem. From the police aspect, we were not involved nor did we want to be involved, you know, in being a police agency. We felt that the other agencies of the government should be involved in that.

Q: So AID was not involved in assistance to local security, police, this type of thing?

VALDEZ: Not that I know of. I don't think so. It was being dealt more as an agricultural problem, because in Bolivia it's perfectly legal to grow cocoa. It's converting into that cocaine that's. ...

Q: Can you make chocolate out of cocoa too or not?

VALDEZ: Yes.

Q: It's the same plant, isn't it?

VALDEZ: Yes. But our role was to try to promote crops to substitute where possible. As I say, I don't think it was very effective, because the market prevailed.

Q: What about the National Security Agency at the White House? Did they weigh in?

VALDEZ: National Security Council?

Q: I mean National Security Council, yes. Did they weigh in much at your level or not?

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VALDEZ: Yes, they had an active interest in the AID program as well as Ex-Im Bank, whatever we were doing, and particularly because of the human rights policies.

Q: Where were the major human rights problems that were involved with AID programs?

VALDEZ: I suppose it was in Guatemala, Nicaragua, on and on. Haiti, quite a few countries had problems.

Q: How did you become appointed Chief of Protocol?

VALDEZ: I'm not sure to this day. All I know is that I had occasion to meet the President on a couple of occasions while I was at AID, and I also went I think on one trip with Mrs. Carter — I was appointed to a delegation for the inauguration of the President of Costa Rica along with several other officials of the government and private citizens. And I met Mrs. Carter on that trip. Somewhere along the line someone recommended me for the job. It was not a job that I was seeking. In fact, I wasn't that interested in the beginning because I was enjoying policy making and managing the program. And this required a different kind of approach to a job. It dealt a lot with the diplomatic corps, with heads of states, had quite a bit of substance to it. It wasn't just ceremonial, but it still was not the job that I thought I envisioned myself stepping into after AID.

Q: Let me ask a question. I spoke not too long ago with Marion Smoak, who was a former Chief of Protocol, who said that he felt that there was not enough use of the Chief of Protocol because you were often with a Chief of State for a fairly long period of time and can further policy and that position could be used much better than he felt it was during the time he was Chief of Protocol. But he said he received next to no real briefing from the desk or the area people for furthering our political aims. Did you find this true?

VALDEZ: No, in fact, we had briefing book for every trip that I had, but I think the Chief of Protocol is not the Secretary of State nor is he an Assistant Secretary of State. He's not a policy maker and, therefore, I don't think it's appropriate for the Chief of Protocol to engage

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in that kind of policy dialogue. If you want to do that, be Ambassador in the field or be an Assistant Secretary or Secretary of State.

And I think that's one of the frustrating things, and I can understand Smoak's frustration, because there you are with the most important people in the world and it's really not your role to discuss policies. And from one, especially coming from where I had come, substantive policy making, very active and substantive interest. Not everybody's been appointed Chief of Protocol has had an substantive interest. A lot of people wanted social standing, or people would give their right arm to have that job. I guess I was unique in that I was not looking for that job. In fact, I expressed some disinterest when it was first broached, but it came back again and the message was the President would like to announce your appointment at such and such time. What do you say? So that's how that worked.

I can understand his frustration. I certainly shared it, but I knew my role was not that of policy maker and so therefore I avoided it.

Q: What were your major functions?

VALDEZ: I guess there were about three or four functions. One is whenever the President of the United States travels abroad to act as sort of a chief advance person to negotiate a schedule with foreign governments, to plan everything that would happen on that trip step by step, to be concerned about the ceremonial as well as the cultural issues in that country. Whenever a foreign head of state came here, we would do the same in reverse. We would help to plan that head of state's trip to the United States, a visit to the White House, but also oftentimes visits around the country on state visits. Thirdly, serve as a contact point for the foreign diplomatic corps here, foreign ambassadors, on many issues relating to their embassy operations and consulate operations in the United States, relations with the local governments. And then personal issues that would come up that would be of concern to the Department of State. The Chief of Protocol served as a contact

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point. And, fourth, is to be a glorified housekeeper at Blair House, because that falls under the domain of Chief of Protocol to see that it's properly used, it's properly maintained and so forth. Those were the major functions.

Q: Did you have problems, say when the President is going abroad, he takes such a large entourage and you're always dealing with so many prima donnas who gather around the President who, I'm sure, must want to direct where he goes and what he does, and this must be very difficult.

VALDEZ: It is. Particularly you find the White House domestic advance people, who oftentimes have very little knowledge of foreign countries and foreign governments and foreign culture, try to use the same techniques for getting things done in those countries that they use when they go visit a city or a state in this country.

Q: There's always a feeling of horror every time you're in a country where this happens — I'm speaking of the American Foreign Service abroad — because of this insensitivity sometimes.

VALDEZ: That's right. I used to say that Chiefs of Protocol are only decorated when things go wrong, and I guess for American Ambassadors abroad that the thing to be most concerned about is to have a visit by your President to that country, because then you could probably get decorated. There were often great possibilities for disaster when the President comes and brings his retinue.

Q: Could you crack the whip pretty much, or was this a matter of negotiation?

VALDEZ: Negotiation. Negotiation, because you had some very energetic and important people involved in this whole process. A lot of people, as you mentioned. The National Security Council, the President's personal staff, other people in State, some of the other agencies that would be involved in planning a trip. So it was one of negotiation.

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Q: Did President Carter play much of role or this was up to all of you to work out? He would go. He had other things to worry about.

VALDEZ: It was up to us to make it happen.

Q: What trips did he make while you were Chief of Protocol

VALDEZ: Well, you may remember that was the beginning of the Iran crisis. I was appointed in September of. ...

Q: This is the hostages, the American Embassy.

VALDEZ: Yes, in 1979 in November, the first week in November that the hostage crisis began. So he didn't travel a great deal. In fact, I think I had only one trip. We went to several countries. We went to Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Vatican, Yugoslavia. I don't know if you were in Belgrade at the time. It was 1980.

Q: No, I was in Naples, but you went up to Venice. I think it was Venice.

VALDEZ: That's right. The Venice Summit. That was the one trip that I took. He went to Japan for a memorial service for the late Prime Minister of Japan. It was really about a 6 hour visit to Tokyo. I did not go on that trip.

Q: I have to ask if the canals posed any problem when you all went to Venice for the summit there, the economic summit.

VALDEZ: Well, transportation, a different mode of transportation. No, not a great problem. In fact, it was a kind of interesting place to be for that kind of summit because it was a great tourist attraction and yet it became populated by foreign heads of states and their retinues. So I think we transformed Venice there for a few days. I think what struck me

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the most was when we got off the plane and went into the back of the hangar and got into boats to go into the city. A different kind of taxi.

Q: When you were there, was there any trip that a head of state made to the United States that caused particular headaches or problems?

VALDEZ: No, I was very fortunate. I was not decorated while I was Chief of Protocol — by my government [laughter]. I escaped without a scratch. Not all my predecessors have been so fortunate. There have been two or three in particular that were decorated. One for bending the knee to the wrong personage. I guess they had forgotten that a good rule in the United States is you bend the knee to no one except God.

Q: Yes, I know.

VALDEZ: Even to the Pope. I knew better than to bend the knee, even as a practicing Catholic.

Q: I realize you are under a time constraint. I wonder if you could mention what do you feel in the various positions you've had with the government, what was your greatest feeling of accomplishment while you were there?

VALDEZ: I guess the AID job, because I recognized the need for economic development and for assistance from the United States. It showed I think our best values to a lot of people abroad. You saw some of the benefits of the program. You dealt with people at every level of society in those countries. And I think that was the job that gave me the most satisfaction. It required multi-talent. One, to deal with the host governments and people who were actually receiving the aid, dealing with our own foreign affairs and international affairs bureaucracy. Not only State but the NSC and the other agencies, dealing with Congress, defending our policy and budgets, dealing with the press. As I say, it really was a very challenging position. And then managing your own bureau, in my case about a

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thousand people in 18 countries and in our office here in Washington. So it was full time job. I'd go home at night and I felt like I'd been in a 15 round boxing match every day.

Q: Since in part these interviews are to be used for young Foreign Service officers to gain some experience by reading these, what is your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the Foreign Service, both in AID and in State?

VALDEZ: Well, there are a lot of strengths to the Foreign Service. It is a very important part of our government, not always appreciated unfortunately in part because many people don't know what a Foreign Service officer does on a regular basis, on a daily basis. Unlike the military that's more dramatic involvement in many cases, the Foreign Service is not as well understood or appreciated by the American people.

I think one of the things that would help improve the Foreign Service, and I think it's being done but not in sufficient quantity, is more understanding about how the American people look at foreign affairs, more involvement in Foreign Service officers in some rotation jobs dealing with state or local governments, more in universities, perhaps even in private corporations.

Q: They try this a little, but it's difficult because now the Service has become more competitive and all these out-of-job functions are considered time lost.

VALDEZ: That's right and that's unfortunate because I think Foreign Service officers would benefit tremendously, and I think our policy would benefit if they would see sort of the real life in the United States. I think that they might help to overcome this ignorance that I mentioned by the rest of the American people about the Foreign Service and improve their own understanding about what the American people want in their foreign policy. There's more than one way to do it, and I think really you've got to have some experience.

Q: Yes, I agree with you absolutely. Well, Mr. Ambassador, I realize that time is running out and I want to thank you very much for this.

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VALDEZ: My pleasure.

End of interview